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WASHINGTON — The cold war got even icier yesterday when the Soviet delegation effectively walked out of the strategic nuclear arms talks in Geneva and the Reagan administration prepared to release a bombshell report on Russian violations of the SALT accords.

As reports swirled that Soviet leader Yuri Andropov may be trying to return to the helm despite a debilitating illness, the Soviet arms control delegation in the Swiss capital ended yesterday's bargaining session without setting a date for a new round of talks.

The Soviets, responding to the deployment of U.S. Pershing and cruise missiles in Europe, have also walked out of the intermediate-range nuclear arms talks.

U.S. officials reacted angrily to the Soviet move — which appeared aimed at adding to Europe's unrest over deployment of the American missiles.

White House spokesman Larry Speakes said the Soviets were "unjustified" in trying to link the deployment of intermediate-range missiles in Europe to the strategic arms reduction talks (START) — which deal with heavier intercontinental ballistic missiles.

"We are prepared to continue our discussions," said Speakes. "We think there is a basis for agreement."

"We believe it is in the

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paramount interests of the entire world that the talks continue and we will do everything we can to see that they do.

"We have demonstrated great flexibility in the talks by modifying our



YURI ANDROPOV: Comeback?

positions to take into account the concerns of the Soviets," Speakes said.

The Soviet walkout at the START talks came as U.S. intelligence agencies received reports that Andropov, who has not been seen in public for months, was trying to go back to work.

Intelligence sources told The Post, however, that they believe Andropov remains in very bad shape. They said his predecessor, Leonid Brezhnev, also tried to make a show of power in the last days of his life.

Meanwhile, the State Dept., the Pentagon and U.S. intelligence agencies put the finishing touches on a politically explosive new report about repeated Soviet violations of the SALT accords.